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## CASE STUDY INCLUSIVE AND JUST TRANSITION TO CLEAN ENERGY IN COLOMBIA; CULTIVATING THE LOCAL WORKFORCE IN GUAJIRA

As competitively procured renewable energy generation ramps up in Colombia, engaging local communities is more important than ever. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is working with the Government of Colombia to ensure opportunities are equitably distributed through jobs and workforce training in rural communities in La Guajira.

## Renewable Energy Auctions Drive the Transition to Renewables in Colombia

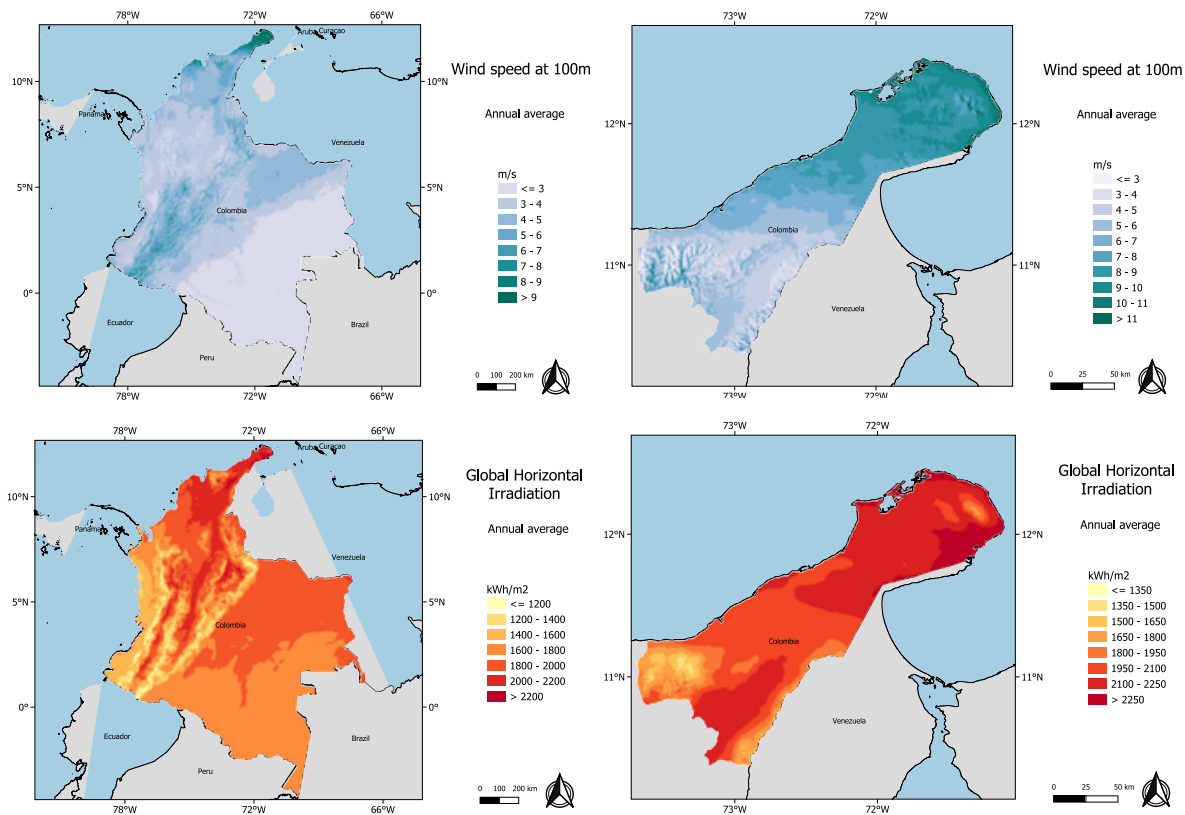
The Government of Colombia, with the help of [USAID's Scaling Up Renewable Energy program](#), is using a program of renewable energy auctions as a policy tool to reach climate targets, procure growing volumes of renewable energy, and ensure a more resilient energy supply for the country.

A renewable energy auction is a competitive procurement process that enables countries to find the most cost-effective renewable energy projects on the market. In an auction, energy project developers bid against each other to supply energy through long-term contracts at the

lowest possible price. Awards are generally made based on bids submitted by participating energy providers according to transparent award rules.

The majority of awarded wind power projects are located in the Guajira region, which has one of the highest sustained wind speeds in the world. While rich in some natural resources, Guajira is also a desert region and one of the most impoverished parts of Colombia. It is home to a large number of nomadic, Indigenous people who live in rural villages, isolated and poorly connected to the rest of the country due to lack of formal infrastructure. Twenty-eight percent of residents lack electricity services, but this number rises to 60 percent in the region's most rural areas ([IRENA](#)).

### GUAJIRA



Wind speeds and solar irradiation in Colombia (left) and La Guajira (right).  
Source: [IRENA](#).

# Proyectos eólicos y líneas de transmisión en La Guajira



Colombia's Ministry of Mines and Energy poster with wind project and transmission line locations.

Initially, the auctions have awarded six large scale wind projects that were awarded in Colombia's October 2019 auction and will be built in Guajira. As these projects succeed, the government plans for many more wind projects to come on line in the region. These projects offer the potential to foster development of local industries, create jobs, and include small and new players.



Wind projects will provide 1,077 MW of power and will be located in the Guajira region, which has one of the highest wind speeds in the world. In total, this region has more than 8,000 MW of projects registered for renewable energy generation



## Community Outreach and Local Participation

All infrastructure projects, regardless of their energy source, affect the local community where they are sited. Many utility-scale renewable energy projects are located in rural areas with lower population density and higher wind speeds or in deserts with fewer clouds and more sunlight. Communities living close to the project site or the associated grid infrastructure often include marginalized groups who are less likely to be consulted and informed on renewable energy projects or to have their voices heard. This puts them more at risk of losing control over the use of land and resources.

Colombia has numerous Indigenous peoples, and their communities are already disproportionately affected by other historical injustices. Consultation and engagement with local communities can be more difficult due to mistrust, language barriers, and complex land rights.

Local communities may reject renewable energy projects for a variety of reasons. These include instances where a project is perceived to have a potentially negative impact on traditionally owned land or natural resources, where there is a lack of consensus regarding compensation and/or benefit-sharing, where women are more adversely affected or benefit less than men, and where there are potentially negative health and environmental impacts. Therefore, a robust process for engaging with local communities helps ensure the social feasibility of awarded projects.

Led by the Office of the Vice President, the Government of Colombia set out to develop a comprehensive and multisector initiative to engage the private sector and local communities where renewable energy projects are planned. The initiative analyzed the social impacts of renewable energy projects as well as issues that could cause delays, cost overruns, and



Wind energy infrastructure in Guajira, Colombia.

cancellation of projects. [Social impacts](#) refer to changes from the baseline condition, as a result of a renewable energy project, to individuals and communities in the way they live, work, play, relate to one another, organize, and manage as members of their society. While the multisector initiative required renewable energy developers to complete a social impact assessment to obtain an environmental permit, it also supported the delivery of infrastructure and equipment to the area, facilitated the consultation process with local communities, and developed a workforce plan for the construction and operation of renewable energy projects.



With support from USAID and others, the Government of Colombia will provide sustainable local workforce training that will upskill community members and benefit the renewable energy companies working in Guajira.

In Guajira, the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) and USAID surveyed renewable energy project awardees to determine the skilled and unskilled local labor force needed to bring projects online and catalyze long-lasting economic benefits for the local population. This long-term initiative to develop workforce capacity is starting with a short- and medium-term effort focused on a mix of technical and non-technical cross-cutting job opportunities in the community.

With support from USAID, the regional technological training institute (SENA), the Governor of Guajira, two local universities, and MME, are creating a sustainable local workforce training program for Guajira that will meet the needs of both the indigenous communities and the renewable energy companies that will be working in the province. To determine what the training should focus on, USAID surveyed renewable energy companies implementing projects in the Guajira region that analyzed potential workforce demand for the next four years.

The program also formalizes a communication channel among stakeholders so they can continue

working together to complete projects while creating socioeconomic benefits such as jobs and marketable skills for local community members, including Indigenous people and women.

### Workforce Development in 2022 and Beyond

In February 2022, USAID and SENA will begin workforce development training activities that will coincide with the renewable energy developments coming online.

The training program will be delivered in phases, starting with an introductory course on renewable energy and the energy transition taking place in Colombia. The training will also cover topics on the environment and climate change and will be translated into the community's local language. Each student will have the option to select training modules to gain specific knowledge in topics of interest. At the completion of the training, participants will be nationally certified as competent in demonstrating knowledge and skills necessary to work in various areas related to renewable energy.

Community Mapping in Guajira.



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The renewable energy projects along with the workforce development program are expected to consolidate a development engine for the region and catalyze long-lasting economic benefits for the local population, including the Indigenous Wayuu communities in Guajira, with a focus on young women.

### Lessons Learned: Community Engagement and Workforce Development

By fostering local community participation, including local consultation on project permits and development, auctions and other renewable energy deployment mechanisms are effective in supporting a just and inclusive energy transition. (IRENA Coalition for Action, 2020).

The five crucial types of policies that improve community engagement and workforce development during auctions include:

1. Government policies that aim to leverage and enhance domestic capabilities;
2. Education and skills policies that increase technical capacities and technological learning within the local community;

3. Labor market policies that facilitate labor opportunities, rights, and mobility;

4. Financial policies that encourage revenue streams that benefit more people; and

5. Social protection policies that provide support for vulnerable workers and their communities and prevent them from shouldering an unfair burden during the energy transition.

A just and inclusive energy transition cannot occur in isolation. It interacts with socioeconomic structures and has ramifications for macroeconomic stability, trade, investment, supply chains, production capacity, and employment. In fact, new employment opportunities are among the benefits that renewable energy projects and auctions can promote, thus helping alleviate the unemployment challenges that many Colombians face. Newly created local jobs must be equitably distributed within the population—in terms of gender, ethnic minorities, and marginalized groups—and must be sustainable and economically significant for those employed.



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